
New poll finds widespread support for stem cell research

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A new *Harris Interactive/HealthDay* poll came to the not-so-startling conclusion that most Americans support using embryos left over from in vitro fertilization for research purposes, including human embryonic stem cell research.

According to the report, Humphrey Taylor, chairman of the Harris Poll that conducted to online survey said:

“Even among Catholics and born-again Christians, relatively few people believe that stem cell research should be forbidden because it is unethical or immoral.”

The process of in vitro fertilization (IVF) can result in ten or more embryos. If a woman gets pregnant quickly, then the remaining embryos stay in a freezer until the couple decides they no longer want to pay for storage. At that time, the couple can either put the embryos up for adoption (an option rarely chosen), discard the embryos - destroying them - or donate them to research. In order to donate those embryos to research rather than discarding them, a couple must give full informed consent that they understand how the resulting stem cells will be used. The NIH will only approve lines for funding that have clear consent and were derived from excess IVF embryos.

One telling finding from the survey was:

“Seventy-three percent (versus 72 percent in 2005) believe that stem cell research should be allowed "as long as the parents of the embryo give their permission, and the embryo would otherwise be destroyed.”

A recent post on the Baker Institute blog had a nice analysis of the relationship between IVF and stem cell research. In it, the authors write:

“With such wide support for IVF, it is remarkable that there is still such a public outcry in the United States over the use of leftover embryos for scientific research. From a moral standpoint, one can argue that in both cases an embryo is destroyed and the destruction of an embryo is always wrong. But isn't it worse to discarding an embryo than to use the embryo for research and development of treatments for currently incurable diseases? Embryonic stem cell research has the potential to bring relief to people suffering from diseases such as Parkinson's disease, muscular dystrophy and diabetes, as well as catastrophic injuries including those to the spinal cord.

Federal agencies such as the NIH can only fund research with already created embryonic stem cell lines. They cannot fund the creation of new lines from discarded IVF embryos. This work is often funded by private agencies or organizations such as CIRM. Here's a list of all CIRM-funded grants for the creation of new lines.

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